

Laura Vega

Mariko Kora

Final Project

SECTION 1

Person interviewed: Interviewee's title or position: Date, time, and length of interview:

Your objective in conducting this interview:

The person we interviewed for our final project was Rosemarie Barnett, an Indian-American immigration rights attorney based in New York. The interview was conducted on April 4, 2018 in professor Christoff's office at 7pm and it approximately lasted for one hour. The interview was done through Google Hangouts and was video recorded. The objective of the interview was to find out about Mrs. Barnett's childhood, the events that led up to her current position and how her missions and goals as an Asian-American woman relates to US-Asian relations.

SECTION 2

Description of the pre-interview research (What did you find out prior to the interview about the person and/or place with which she is affiliated? How did you prepare for the interview?)

As soon as we were assigned a prominent Asian-American woman to interview, we began our research. Using keywords such as "Rosemarie Barnett lawyer" and "Rosemarie Barnett immigration", we found several links on the Google search engine that gave us information about our interviewee. The first link we accessed was Mrs. Barnett's LinkedIn profile. This provided us with background information such as where she attended both

undergraduate and graduate schools, as well as her previous job experiences at large law firms, and her current position at her own firm. The second link we found led us to Mrs. Barnett's professional website. This website gave us a plethora of information on the practice areas Mrs. Barnett specializes in: immigration, matrimonial/family law, personal injury and commercial litigation. Additionally, it provided us with a list of her pro bono experience, which is one of the topics we decided to ask her about during the interview.

Once we had a rough basis of who Mrs. Barnett was and the law firms in which she was affiliated, we drafted questions that would give us more insight on her life before college. We specifically wanted to know more about her life in India because we were unable to find that information through our research. Other questions we wanted to ask Mrs. Barnett related to her career; what steps she took to jump start a career in law and if there were any difficulties she faced along the way because she is an Asian-American woman.

Interview Questions

1) Early Childhood/Biographical - Mariko

- a) We heard that you spent your childhood in India, could you tell us about your experience living there and at what age did you move to the U.S.?
 - i) How was it transitioning to the U.S., what were the biggest cultural shocks you had or differences.
 - ii) Would you identify yourself as American, Indian or Indian-American?
 - iii) How do the gender roles in India differ from the U.S.?
- b) Could you tell us about your family life in India/the U.S.?
 - i) How do they differ in terms of cultural aspects?

- ii) Could you tell us about your parents and the influence that they had on you? Do you have any siblings, how was your relationship with them growing up?

2) Education - Laura

- a) Where did you attend school in India?
 - i) Where did you attend school in the U.S.?
 - ii) How would you compare and contrast these experiences?
- b) How did you decide upon what you wanted to study/what inspired your interest in law and becoming an attorney?

3) Career highlights -

Mariko

- a) We've read that you have worked with clients including a constitutional law scholar from China, a transgender woman from Mexico and recent child arrivals from Central American countries, could you expand upon your experience working with these people?
 - i) What are some things you have learned from working with such a diverse clientele?
- b) How was the transition from working at a law firm to opening up your own practice? Were there any challenges you faced?
 - i) What was the deciding factor that caused you to open your own firm?

Laura

- c) What difficulties (if any) have you faced in your career because you are an Asian American woman?
- d) Could you give us your opinion on the current US Immigration policy, what or how do you think improvements could be made? (mention DACA)

4) Reflections upon their career/what they would change

- a) If you could change anything about your life/career, what would you have done differently? Why? (**Laura**)
- b) Do you still go back to India/do you have any relatives there? What are some ways you embrace your Indian culture/background? (**Mariko**)
- c) How do you go about finding a career that satisfies you?
- d) How do you progress in your career/get ahead (as a woman) in India or the U.S.?
 - i) Are the rules of “progressing” up the ladder different for men and women?

SECTION 3

1. Did you get complete answers to your questions? Explain

Mrs. Barnett was an outstanding interviewee because she always went beyond the confines of the questions we asked her and included plenty of details to further explain her answers. For example, when we asked about her upbringing in India, not only did she tell us about her parents and four other siblings, but she also delved into India’s culture, schools, and general way of life. We were fortunate enough to be able to get very complete and detailed information about Mrs. Barnett’s entire life story in just one hour because of how eloquently she spoke and her overall candidness throughout the interview.

2. *Was your interview structured, unstructured, or mixed? Explain*

Our interview was definitely mixed. A majority of our questions were unstructured because we wanted to get Mrs. Barnett's opinions and perspectives on a variety of topics such as the current U.S. immigration policy and the differences between how women are treated in India versus the United States. Several of our questions were structured, like "Where did you attend school in India?" but for the most part, it was a good mix of both structured and unstructured.

3. *What probing questions did you use? Explain*

Most of the questions we posed to Mrs. Barnett were probing questions because we had a sense of her background information, but wanted her to go more in depth into her story. Some examples of probing questions include "Could you tell us more about your family life in India and the United States? How did they differ in terms of cultural aspects?" and "How was the transition from working at a law firm to opening up your own practice? What was the deciding factor that caused you to open your own firm?"

4. *Explain your team approach. That is, who did what?*

When preparing questions for the interview, we worked together to compile a list of both open and closed ended questions for our interviewee. We discussed what we already knew about Ms. Barnett through our previous research and what we wanted to know more about (e.g. India, her childhood, the process of opening her own law firm). During the interview itself, we took turns asking each question, and each of us would expand upon a question or add our own comments to converse with Mrs. Barnett. We also decided to both take notes during the interview to ensure we caught every detail.

5. *Did the interviewee give you any documents or references to articles to read, or did she mention other people for you to talk to (or research)? Explain*

No, Mrs. Barnett did not give us references to people or documents. She did, however, mention Professor Christoff and how the two of them initially met. This topic was brought up during the interview when we asked Mrs. Barnett how she and her family continue to celebrate their Indian culture while living in the United States. Each year, she prepares a large, traditional Indian dinner spread for her friends and family, she dresses in Indian clothing, and even has Indian dance performances and henna tattoo stations, occasionally. Mrs. Barnett revealed that aside from this annual extravaganza, she does not get to celebrate her culture as much as she would like to, but she doesn't feel the need to because she is Indian on the inside and that is enough for her.

SECTION 4

Interview Transcript

Mariko - We heard that you spent your childhood in India, could you tell us about your experience living there, and what age did you move to the U.S?

Ms. Barnett - I lived in India, I was born and raised there and my father was an Engineer. He was a very hard working man, and we were a family of five kids that moved around a lot. He died when I was 10 years old. We also lived in Taiwan for a couple of years, because of his job, we were there when he died. After his death we moved back to India, and it was a tough time because if you know anything about Asian cultures it's all about legacy and family property - my father's side of the family started a big family property fight with my mother, and it became a

very ugly situation. We ended up without very many resources. I wouldn't say we were poor, but I wouldn't say we were comfortable. My mother was a brave woman, she said "I'm gonna invest in one thing, not in your dowries but in your education". We went to an exclusive boarding school and it set us up for life. I was lucky enough to find out about a scholarship at a small women's college in Massachusetts and received it, I was 21 by then because I had done a couple of years of college in India. I came with nothing but a couple of bucks in my pocket. My mother was scared to send me off into the world, but I decided that I was here for the long haul and decided to stick it out. The first half of my childhood was very pampered, but then the second half was finding out about how life isn't so perfect, but it made us very close as a family.

Laura - Could you talk to us about the cultural shock you had when you came to the United States?

Ms. Barnett - Oh my goodness it was culture shock. I came from a very big cosmopolitan city called Bombay (now called Mumbai), to a very small college town in Massachusetts. It was a huge shock in terms of differences in technology. In India at the time we didn't have any cable television. For example Americanized media such as MTV and seeing a much less repressed society was a culture shock. There was lots of music, drinking and dancing, but the framework was in a small college town. Outside of the college I wasn't use to hearing the crickets after dark, it was all trees, no tall buildings or cars and the quietness drove me crazy. It felt like I was in a horror movie. I was this big city girl from a third world country but thrown in to a first world country, but in a small town. It was a strange time, and the food was so different too. I would crave my Indian food, but at the same time I found American food great, but it made me so fat.

Mariko - How do you think the gender roles differ between India and America?

Ms. Barnett - When I first came here I thought it was a gender or discrimination free paradise in comparison to India. I thought it was so easy to be whatever you wanted to be here, and I still believe this to some extent when compared to India. But now having lived here for 30 years I see that it's not as perfect as I thought it was in the beginning. When I first got here I thought it was amazing that I could wear shorts, and not having to worry about people touching me or saying dirty things and not having to be escorted by a man. In India I would always buck the norm, and be bold and daring. I come from a small sub-culture of Christians we always spoke English and wore Western clothes, we always stood out, and because we wore western clothes people automatically assumed that we were easy targets. I always grew up feeling uncomfortable. I remember coming back from boarding school often an easy target, but at the time we just thought of it as it is what it is. I remember one time standing up for myself on a bus yelling at the person who was rubbing himself up against me. I told the bus driver to kick him off of the bus, and the bus driver told me to get off of the bus "dressed in a dress like that". It was a long baggy dress and then he kicked me off. Stuff like this would happen all of the time and I learned that you just had to be quiet, it was ugly horrible stuff. Coming from that and coming to the U.S. it was liberating. Of course there's violent crimes here, but it seems like nothing compared to there, and if I were doing the things I did here in India it would have been guaranteed that I would be dead or raped.

Laura - How did you decide you wanted to get in to Law?

Ms. Barnett - Growing up I was always someone who was very argumentative. People always joked that I should be a lawyer. I never took it seriously, because in India it was very expensive, and my mother did not have the money. We all thought that we had to be practical, so I got a bachelors in commerce. My real true dream was to have become an Engineer, but again the thought of putting my mother through this expense was not acceptable. When I came to the U.S. to a small liberal arts school I just decided to get a Bachelors in Business. I always picked classes based on what was available to me because I was a scholarship student. The law didn't really happen until I went on to get an MBA and I took a law class which fascinated me and made me think this is what I really wanted to do. When I was in grad school that was when I met my husband to be, we got married after grad school, but then life happened and we had two kids. I put it off for a while, when the the kids were toddlers, I then went on to law school at 31. While I was in law school I also had my daughter.

Mariko - We've read that you have worked with clients including a constitutional law scholar from China, a transgender woman from Mexico and recent child arrivals from Central American countries, could you expand upon your experience working with these people?

Ms. Barnett - Sure, yeah I've always been interested in immigration and helping people who face some very bad experiences. I've worked at very large law firms up until 5 years ago. At these law firms they encourage you to do pro bono work. From this avenue I got involved with a couple of nonprofits that do this kind of work. Through Human Rights First I got to represent the

Chinese Legal Scholar - just because he wrote a couple of essays about China's one party system he got thrown into jail we successfully were able to win this case. Once I started my law firm my natural inclination was to focus more on immigration, by taking more classes and getting more training. I represent a lot of children from Central America and getting them special immigrant juvenile status, I also work with a lot of women and families fleeing from the crazy gang violence from these countries.

Laura - You mentioned that you worked at a lot of large law firms up until a couple of years ago, so can you discuss how it was opening up your own practice?

Mrs. Barnett - Sure, I never saw myself as someone opening up my own practice, because I saw myself as a big firm kind of person. I thought I would be a cog in a very big machine, and be happy with that. There was a couple of things it was very stressful, and required a lot of hours, hard work and pressure to excel; to be better than anybody else. The work was very tough, and everyone was a type A personality. Honestly there was a lot of discrimination against women, and Asian women, in particular Asian women who were older than the rest. Even though I had graduated second in my class I was recruited by larger firms, but the minute I was there you could tell I was never going to be on partnership track. My destiny was set from day one even though I was thinking I was gonna work really hard, it's a meritocracy. There was a bias against me and women like me, we would be stuck doing a lot of the boring work such as document work in the background, and we didn't get to go to court. It was other people who got to go to a courtroom, unless I was doing pro bono work. Institutionally there isn't a commitment to developing everyone's careers in a fair and equal way. One time I remember going to a job

interview as a third year law student, and half way through the interview the guy told me I know you're smart but im going to say no because your kids are the same age as my kids, and my wife and I met at this law firm as first year associates, and right now she's home because three kids requires one parent to be home. I couldn't believe at how sexist that was , and I told him right away there's going to be one parent the dad. He said I'm doing you a favor, I know you want a career but this kind of career at a white shoe firm is not for you. I swear if that happened to me 10 years later I would have made a big stink over it on social media. Most people are not going to stand up and say something because they just want their career going. That's what I did I was highly offended and highly upset, but didn't do anything more I really should've pushed now that I think about it, it was a missed opportunity. But I thought, do you really want to be labeled as a trouble maker? So you just decide to walk away from those fights. So, that was one of the reasons I left the big law arena. Bottom line I was a mom I had other responsibilities, I wasn't just solely a career person. The money was super rewarding in a big firm, but in other ways it was not good at all. In 2012 hurricane Sandy hit and it destroyed my house; that was dealing with being "homeless" and living in a motel, it just made me realize I can't do the 14 hour days in the city anymore. I was thinking maybe I'll just do some contract work, but then I decided to start my own practice. It was very scary, but I had a friend who had started already and she showed me the nuts and bolts.

Mariko - Could you give us your opinion and current U.S. immigration policy, what or how do you think improvements could be made?

Ms. Barnett - How the laws are being implemented are very draconian, everyday there are new changes being made. For example with marriage petitions you find that there's more requests from the government such as the number of interviews and denials which have increased. It's like the law in some ways has remained the same, but the way they are implementing it is stricter. In Immigration court it's way worse, before we use to be able to settle out certain cases if they weren't a risk to national security, and they were here basically because they're running away from violence or poverty, they weren't going to be a problem in this country. A lot of times you would have to write a memo as to why they're deserving - like a plea bargain, and now they don't do this anymore. Every case has to go to trial, every trial is strictly enforced against the immigrants, and it's very tough. Immigration policy needs to change, yes I agree that we need to have better security at the borders, but at the same time this is a country of immigrants, and it doesn't make any sense that we have millions and millions of people that live here undocumented. A lot of these undocumented people are paying taxes and are working really hard but there's no way for them to become documented and become a part of American society. I believe that so many people are left uninformed. I felt that under Obama, the law enforcement side was kept strong, and it tried to keep families united, but he also deported a lot of people too, but at the sametime if they were families, children and women and fleeing from violence they had a fighting chance, but now they don't. I really hope that things change in Washington, something needs to be done. Anyone who practices immigration law is sick to the stomach as to how bad it is. I have a trial coming up and I have to prepare my clients ahead of time to save money ahead of time, because I know they're not going to win. It's hard to think of these people who are so hopeful. People say they arrived here with no VISA, but may be we would be doing

the same thing if we were facing the same violence and threats to ourselves. General violence is not enough for an asylum case. The laws are very complicated, you have to be a legal scholar to understand half the laws out there.

Laura: So we know that you opened your own practice only five years ago, but so far if there's anything you would change about your life or career what would you have done differently?

Ms. Barnett: I think I would have started my own law practice a while ago, actually. To think of the 12 or 13 years that I spent at these big firms.. Yeah it was decent money but it was at such a cost. Like I said, I always felt I was the back room lawyer; I felt like I never had a chance and it was always exhausting...and you're always terrified of being fired because everyone is so good! Everyone's a star from their own hometown or their own law school so it's the best of the best. You're either in the top 5% of a smaller law school or you're from an Ivy league so everybody's a type A, flashy kind of person and it's exhausting to be there all the time. I feel like, yeah, it was an accomplishment to swim in those waters but for personal happiness, which is actually something very important, and people don't give it as much importance, especially women, I think I would have done this a long time ago. If I look back, I should have been practicing by myself for 10 to 12 years by now, instead of just 5.

Mariko: Going back to India: Do you still go back and do you have any relatives there? What are some ways you embrace your Indian culture/background?

Ms. Barnett: I don't go home as much as I'd like to; the last time I went was in 2015 for my sister's 25th wedding anniversary. My mom lives with me now, which makes traveling hard. My

kids also like India; one of my kids who's in college spent a summer there, but the other two haven't had a chance [to go] yet. We're very Indian at home, but like I told you earlier, we're from a subculture from India that is more Westernized anyway. One of the ways we celebrate is once a year, I throw this big Indian dinner and I cook everything. This is how I met your professor, as a matter of fact! I don't get to celebrate being Indian that often but I feel like I'm so Indian to the core that I don't need to celebrate it because I am it!

Laura: What advice would you give to people in our generation who are looking to find a career that is satisfying for them in the long run?

Ms. Barnett: I have this conversation with my children a lot, actually, and their friends too. I find a lot of people in your age group are very lost because there's so much pressure on you guys. You've grown up in a world where there's a lot of information out there at all times but you guys get bombarded too much. You're already so jaded because you've seen the world through this lense where you see the good and the bad, and the bad seems to come hurtling at you all the time because of the media. You guys have a lot on your plates and I would say the one thing you should really focus on is to try and drown out all those negative voices. The good thing about living in this generation is that there are way more opportunities for you. You have to be creative, you have to keep thinking, and my biggest piece of advice to people your age is that life is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you really want it, it will happen.

Mariko: How do you progress in your career/get ahead (as a woman) in India or the U.S.? Are the rules of "progressing" up the ladder different for men and women?

Ms. Barnett: Yes, absolutely! One thing that women do is that we work very hard; we always think if you work really hard and you hand in a piece of work that's perfect, you will be rewarded. We automatically have this really great work ethic. Always do that anyway, but we have to borrow from the men's playbook. We have to learn how to brag about ourselves, we have to learn how to market, we have to be shameless self promoters. I still find that hard, but then I realize, 'Wait a minute, I have accomplished quite a bit,' and you should be unabashed about promoting yourself in the workplace. Let your work speak for itself, absolutely, but also learn how to take an opportunity. The deck is not stacked in our favor. Once you understand the rules, you'll win.

Laura: In India, do you think women still face the same struggles progressing next to men?

Mrs. Barnett: Absolutely. It's still hard there, there's still a lot of violence around women. It's hard to be a woman in India in that sense because you still have to worry about things like sexual harassment. You cannot work super late at night unless you know for sure that there's a car to take you home; the biggest perpetrators of this violence are cab drivers. In India right now there's an extremist right-wing movement; it's all about returning to traditional principles and that's actually bringing the rights of women even lower. Career-wise, it is getting a little better for women. There's a lot more opportunities, but if you ever asked me if I would go back to live in India I would say no. The bottom line is, it's not a place to establish a career. And that's what I have to say about that.

Both: Thank you so much for your time, we really appreciate it.

SECTION 5

What aspects of the interview did you find to be particularly meaningful?

An aspect of the interview that we found to be particularly meaningful was hearing about the difficulties and discrimination that she faced as an Asian American women. Although these kind of experiences may be shocking or painful to some we thought that they are what build character, and makes an individual stronger in some cases. For instance when Mrs. Barnett discussed the time that she was rejected by a law firm due to being a mother of two, it was particularly shocking, but it gave us insight on how even in a country such as the U.S. that represents itself as liberalized and open, women are discriminated against solely for their gender. Although her husband was fully capable of taking care of their children, the fact that she was a woman made it unacceptable for her to hold the position as the breadwinner in the family. Initially when coming to the U.S. Mrs. Barnett believed the states to be completely discrimination free, but instances like this made her realize that this was not the case.

Another meaningful aspect of the interview was her emphasis on the importance of personal happiness and how ultimately life is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Particularly, we found the career advice that she gave to us as young women of our generation to be quite memorable. She stated that in order to overcome the barriers that we face as women, we need to become more assertive and appeal to others about our capabilities and to borrow from the “men’s playbook”, since “the deck is not stacked in our favor - [but] once you get the rules of the game you’ll be able to win” . This quote really stuck out to us because it emphasized how much women are at an disadvantage in society, but with some effort and utilizing more masculine qualities women can become just as successful. Just as it was emphasized in the missing 33

percent video in class, women are often times not properly taught or given the tools to become leaders. This is often done not on purpose, but naturally which is why it is essential to actively make society realize that women need to be taught the rules of the men's playbook.

What aspects were not useful? What more would you like to know?

Although we did not find any of the aspects of the interview to be unuseful, we thought that if we were students that were interested in pursuing a career in immigration law the interview would have been even more meaningful in further understanding the career. For example we asked her about how she would change the current immigration law system and her experiences working with a diverse clientele and she also gave us very detailed and raw responses on the difficulties that many refugees and immigrants face today in obtaining citizenship. Although neither of us are planning to pursue a career in law, the discussion sparked a lot of interest on how the current political climate is after the change from Obama to Trump, as well as how many of the undocumented citizens today are struggling to become accepted and integrated in to a part of American society.

After conducting the interview we thought that we would like to learn more about her siblings and how their lives turned out to be despite having a similar upbringing as Mrs. Barnett. We also thought that we would further like to hear and discuss her work and experience on the cases she is presently dealing with and more about her work life as an attorney. During the one hour we spent with her we were able to get a great grasp and idea of her personality, upbringing and how her experiences have made her to be the person that she is today. In terms of personal

details she was very open with us, so there was not particularly anything that we were missing from her in that aspect.

What other in-class presentations did you find particularly useful?

During the in-class presentations we learned about many different Asian-American women with interesting backgrounds and careers. On the first day of presentations we learned about Nancy Wang who was a dancer and social worker, her goal was to help serve the people in her community and to blend the gap between the West and East Asian culture. On the second day of presentations we learned about women Such as Amy Hall who is the VP of Eileen Fisher a women's wear company that heavily promotes environmental sustainability, as well as Sarah Park a woman who runs a laundromat business with her husband, and cherishes her family and Christianity with pride. We found the presentation on Mrs. Park to be quite useful because of how different her background and career was in comparison to other women. Despite not having the most prestigious career, her story gave us insight on how many Asian immigrants who do not come from the most privileged backgrounds pursue and work endlessly to make a career for themselves. On the last day of presentations we learned about women including Dr. Ling Ling Ho who grew up in a privileged family in China, but was keen on pursuing education, and was very much aware of her privilege. We thought that this quality in Dr. Ho was similar to how Mrs. Barnett valued her education and used it to prepare herself for the world. Dr. Ho enlisted in the army, and started off as a nurse but later went on to pursue her medical degree, and the biggest struggle she faced came from having a language barrier. We also learned about Sarah-Ann Smith an ex foreign service officer, writer and professor whose main goal was to help people better understand each other and similarly to Nancy Wang was to bridge the gap between U.S. and

China. The main thing we took away from viewing everyone's presentations was seeing the similarities and differences between every woman, but observing how each individual woman's experience woven together completes the fabric of women in US-Asian relations.

The interview we had with Rosemarie Barnett was absolutely delightful, she was an extremely eloquent and engaging speaker and before we had realized, we had spent nearly an entire hour speaking to her. She was very transparent with us throughout the interview and from learning about her childhood in India, to her journey in discovering her current career path, we were able to obtain a meaningful understanding of her experiences and life as an Asian American woman.